Skylights topple Beavers
George Ferguson  
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On Thursday night, the shots weren’t falling for the Montana State University-Northern women’s basketball team. Yet, the Skylights still clawed their way to their 11th win of the season.

In Saturday afternoon’s Duck Inn Classic finale at the MSU-Northern Fieldhouse, the long-range shot became a weapon for the Skylights as they reached win No. 12 on the season by knocking off NCAA Division II rival Minot State University, 69-61. The win avenged Northern’s six-point exhibition loss to the Beavers last month in Billings and also got the Skylights to a remarkable 12-1 with only one game remaining before the start of Frontier Conference play.

“We found a way to beat a very good team tonight,” Northern head coach Chris Mouat said. “They (Beavers) are really good, they are extremely well coached and they are very complete. So this is a big win for us. I think it does show that we’ve gotten better each and every game. We have a ways to go before we get to the league games, but the really good thing about this win was, this was like a league game for us. Minot would be a really good Frontier team and a win like this really helps us prepare for what we’ll see in league games. That’s why it’s so good for us that we play them every year.”

The Skylights made 12 3-pointers against the Beavers and the triples were key, both in helping Northern build a 34-40 halftime lead, as well as being able to come back from an eight-point second-half deficit.

Nikki Tresch, who scored a game-high 20 points, got the Skylights going with 13 first-half points, including two three’s in a span of just over a minute. Tresch hit her first three of the half just after Laramie Schwenke drilled a trey of her own. A second trey by Tresch gave Northern a 29-26 lead late in the first stanza and Tresch’s third bomb with :37 left in until intermission gave the Skylights an important four-point halftime edge.

But halftime might have stopped MSU-N’s momentum because the Beavers came out strong to start the second. Minot ripped off a quick eight points and turned up the heat defensively, while Northern didn’t score its first points of the half until the 14:25 mark when Jordan Bruursema hit a jumper to make the score 41-36.

“They (Beavers) made some great adjustments at halftime,” Mouat said. "They are a very good team and we knew they would do that. Fortunately for us, we settled down some, we started to get the ball inside more and once we got that balance back, it opened things up for us. And then it became a matter of hitting shots and executing defensively, and we were able to do that the rest of the second half.”

Schwenke hit her third three of the night to keep the Skylights close, then Bruursema knocked in a three to give the Skylights the lead back at 9:10 left in the game. Bruursema, who had a big second half, nailed another three with six minutes left to put the Skylights up six. From there, Northern did an outstanding job of containing the Beavers’ big players inside, and Schwenke put the final nail in the coffin when she nailed her fifth three of the game with 3:33 to play, which put the Skylights up by 10. Northern then made a bunch of free throws to put the Beavers away in the final two minutes.
Schwenke finished the game with 17 points, five three’s, five rebounds and five assists, but her last big shot came with a price tag. After making the dagger to really put Minot away, she landed hard on an ankle and was in enough pain that she needed to be carried off the floor. But she, Tresch, Bruursema and some heady play off the bench from Laci Keller, Taylor Cummings and Micah Kirkpatrick wound up spelling doom for the much taller Beavers. Bruursema finished with 14 points, two trey’s and seven boards. Keller gave the Skylights eight points and five rebounds off the bench, while Kirkpatrick and Cummings both knocked in big, momentum changing 3-pointers.

“Jordan was huge tonight,” Mouat said. “She played a great all-around game and really gave us a huge lift in the second half. Laramie was Laramie again, she put us on her back for a while and really took over the game before she got hurt. And Nikki Tresch did the same in the first half. I thought our bench really responded well too. And a big key is that, we fought hard on the boards. It was just another really gutty, all-around team effort tonight.”

And that team effort got the Skylights to within one victory of matching their win total from all of last season. MSU-N’s impressive start this season has been one to watch and Saturday’s victory over Minot State was the second time this season the Skylights have taken down an NCAA DII opponent.

MSU-N will look to earn win 13 when the Skylights close out nonconference play on Dec. 31 against Mount Royal University in Havre.

“I feel like we’re playing really well,” Mouat said. “This is a great start and the great thing is, our effort, even when we haven’t been at our best has always been there. These kids really play hard every single game. And it’s a lot of fun to coach a group that does that. I think our ceiling is still very high. I think we can get a lot better. But I’m really proud of this win tonight, and I’m really proud of what this team has accomplished so far.”

**Skylights 69, Minot State 61**

**MSU** — Micheala Larson 0-0 0-0 0, Lauren Safranski 1-5 3-4 5, Socarra Molina 2-11 4-6 8, Katie Hardy 6-11 2-2 14, Lanise Lindsey 1-2 0-0 2, April Nakatani 2-4 1-2 7, Carly Boag 4-13 0-0 8, Christina Boag 6-12 0-0 15, Morgan Klose 0-4 2-2 2. Totals 22-62 12-16 61.

**MSU-N** — Laramie Schwenke 6-8 0-2 17, Jordan Bruuresma 6-11 0-0 14, Kylee Denham 0-3 0-0 0, Laci Keller 2-2 4-6 8, Kelly Millager 1-2 2-2 4, Micah Kirkpatrick 1-3 0-0 3, Taylor Cummings 1-3 0-2 3, Rachelle Bennett 0-0 0-0 0, Nikki Tresch 4-13 9-10 20. Totals 21-45 15-22 69.